

Information Item

Community Development Committee



Meeting date: May 4, 2026

Topic

Envisioning Growth Toolkit

District(s), member(s):	All
Policy/legal reference:	Imagine 2050, Land Use Objective 1, Policy 2
Staff prepared/presented:	Holly Leaf, Urban Design Planner (651-602-1204)
Division/department:	Community Development / Research

Background

Council staff have been working on the development of the *Envisioning Growth Toolkit*, a set of materials to help local governments plan for residential development in their communities during their comprehensive plan updates. Imagine 2050 increased minimum density requirements for all community designations within the Metropolitan Urban Service Area (MUSA). Net density requirements support the orderly and efficient growth of the metro by ensuring regional services such as wastewater, highways, transit, parks, and redevelopment programs are cost-effective and sustainable.

The tools in Envisioning Growth are intended to help communities plan for growth that meets both local and regional goals. Council staff initiated the project after hearing from local governments about the need for tools to help visualize density and translate density figures measured in dwelling units per acre into the built environment and neighborhood feel.

Four tools are being developed for the Envisioning Growth toolkit. Each addresses different aspects of neighborhood development and residential density. The materials are designed to be flexible and for use in a variety of contexts and audiences. The toolkit focuses on the Suburban and Suburban Edge community designations, as that is where most of the growth in the region is expected to occur by 2050 and where most of the need for tools was generated. However, the tools address a variety of density levels and housing types that would be applicable in other community designations as well.

The four tools currently in development as part of Envisioning Growth are as follows:

- Envisioning Growth Photo Library
- Housing Types & Density Guide
- Calculating Net Density Guide
- Distribution of Development Guide

Envisioning Growth Photo Library

The *Envisioning Growth Photo Library* is an interactive repository showcasing examples of residential neighborhoods throughout the region at a variety of densities, housing types, and communities. Each neighborhood featured in the library includes a set of street-level photographs which will be freely available to use for any presentations, reports, or other communications. Users can explore the library by filtering by net density, housing types, community designation, and/or county. The net density of each location is calculated using the definition of net density set by the Met Council. This tool is

intended to be used to give a clearer understanding of what a given net density looks like using real-world examples from the region.

Housing Types & Density Guide

The guide to *Housing Types & Density* is also intended to help translate density numbers into the built environment, but with a focus on the built form of housing. Nine housing types are defined, each coupled with an estimated range of net densities that at which each type is typically built. The guide also includes example photographs from the Envisioning Growth Photo Library of each housing type. This will aid local communities in land use planning by providing clarity on what housing types might be built at a given density range.

Calculating Net Density Guide

The informational tool *Calculating Net Density* provides a clear definition of how the Council calculates net density and instruction on how to calculate net density through a demonstration. It is intended to be useful to local government staff in reaching minimum density requirements and to communicate with their stakeholders about net density.

Distribution of Development Guide

The guide to the Distribution of Development demonstrates the community-wide impacts of how density is distributed using an example of four different development scenarios which all distribute the same number of housing units on the same piece of land. The guide is intended to help local governments gain a greater understanding of planning for average net density on a wider scale. It will also encourage communities to consider the benefits of planning for a wider diversity of housing types and densities by discussing the potential impacts of development on elements like land preservation, infrastructure efficiency, housing choice, and transportation.

Next Steps

The *Envisioning Growth Toolkit* materials are well under development. The next phase of development will include direct engagement with local government staff through focus groups to garner feedback. The tools will be revised based on this feedback to develop the most useful tools for the intended audiences. The materials are slated to be published to the Local Planning Handbook in early summer so that they are available for communities during their comprehensive plan updates. In addition to the [Local Planning Handbook](#), the toolkit will be demonstrated through learning opportunities offered in the [PlanIt Program](#).

